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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8173
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0503
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0486
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 2029
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0833
RUEHPG/AMEMBASSY PRAGUE 0068
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0251
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA
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SUBJECT: WHAT ARE THEY SMOKING? REGIME SEES U.S. POSITION
SOFTENING

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) During a March 2 meeting with MFA Secretary General Mohameden Ould Sidi dit Bedena on issues related to Israel (SEPTTEL), the Secretary General told Charge that the "government" saw the U.S. was finally coming to better understand the Mauritanian problem as seen in the State Department's February 23 Press Statement following the February 20 meeting of the International Consultative Group for Mauritania. Charge asked what possibly they could see in the statement suggesting any softening of the U.S. position? The Secretary General responded, "The one point on which there was unanimity in Paris was the need for early elections. Whether proposed by the General, Ould Daddah, or Abdallahi doesn't really matter. You now understand better that the political blockage can only be resolved through new elections which we hope you will now help support."

¶2. (C) Charge stressed that there has been no softening whatsoever in the U.S. position. We had praised President Abdallahi for his willingness to offer early presidential and legislative elections once he returns to office for the interests of democracy. Such elections -- in which Abdallahi might well run himself -- would offer a chance to re-establish democratic mandates damaged by the past year. Charge stressed these are not the farce elections being organized by General Aziz. The USG continues to insist that democratic credibility can only be re-established by the return of constitutional legitimacy including the return of the duly elected President of Mauritania. Generals who ran rough-shod over the constitution by launching a coup, and who have since done nothing but manipulate all the tools of power to support their coup, have no credibility in organizing new elections. This led to a largely unhelpful rehash by the Secretary General of how the Generals had been forced to launch a "rectification" to save democracy -- an action that, "if they had delayed by even five minutes would have led to a blood bath."

¶3. (C) Comment: Since the Mission meets very rarely with regime officials, the Secretary General's ludicrous remark may have been meant to probe for any change of U.S. position. Unfortunately, he said it like he believed it. Our concern is that the MFA is scrubbing the international news to tell General Aziz what he wants to hear rather than the truth -- using the most selective word choice from a fully condemnatory U.S. statement to suggest that "if you read

really closely and in the right light the Americans are really saying the opposite of what they wrote." If Aziz' closest advisors are stoking self delusion, it will be all the more difficult to convince him the show is over.

WALSH